



# Howard County Government News Release

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## Howard County cautions residents about charitable foundation scam

ELLCOTT CITY, MD – The Howard County Office of Consumer Protection is warning residents to use caution and common sense when dealing with solicitors who claim to represent firefighter associations or others seeking donations to aid people who have been affected by a fire or disaster. It is important to take the time to check where your generosity is going regardless of the cause.

“It is only natural for people to want to support first responders, especially following natural disasters and other tragedies. But, it is important to make sure that your generosity makes its way to those you want to support and not to con artists who prey on your good will,” suggested Rebecca Bowman, Administrator of the Howard County Office of Consumer Protection.

“We hope residents exercise care to identify potential imposters. Even when the organization is legitimate, it’s important to know how much of your donation will actually go to the people you want to help. We just want our community to be aware of the potential scam,” says Fire Chief John S. Butler.

The Office of Consumer Protection offers these tips:

- Take your time. Be wary of high pressure tactics and requests that donations be paid in cash, by pre-paid gift or debit cards or by wire transfer.
- Make sure you are giving your donation to a legitimate organization. Con artists sometimes use names that are similar to well-known organizations. Ask for written information about the group’s mission and history or do some independent research.
- Make sure the organization is registered. In Maryland, non-profit fundraisers must register with the Office of the Secretary of State (SOS) before asking for donations. The SOS’ website –<http://sos.maryland.gov/Charity/Pages/default.aspx> enables you to see if the organization is registered and provides links to other sites that will assist you in making your donation decisions.
- Ask whether the person calling represents the charity or a professional fundraiser and find out what percentage of your donation will be used for “administrative costs” or “overhead.” It is not uncommon for fundraising companies to take 80 percent or more of

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## Howard County cautions residents about charitable foundation scam *(continued)*

every donation. Sending your donation directly to the organization instead of the fundraiser can help maximize the impact of your gift.

- Check on the charity's reputation using sites like [www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org) and [www.givewell.org](http://www.givewell.org), which rank charities based on efficiency, transparency and accountability.
- Ask how any information you provide will be used. Many organizations continue to contact donors after a donation and may sell or rent your contact information to other organizations. If you are frequently contacted by organizations you do not wish to donate to, ask them to put your name on a "Do Not Call" list.

For more information and/or to report a potential scam, contact the Office of Consumer Protection at 410-313-6420 or visit the Office's "Scam Alert!" website at [www.howardcountymd.gov/scamalert.htm](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/scamalert.htm).

Residents who have lost money or feel their personal safety is at risk due to a scam, should contact the Howard County Police Department's non-emergency phone number at 410-313-2200 to file a report.

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